DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 409 605 EA 028 388

AUTHOR	Lashway, Larry
TITLE	Measuring Leadership Potential. ERIC Digest, Number 115.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, Eugene, OR.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-EA-97-7
PUB DATE	Jun 97
NOTE	3p.
CONTRACT	RR93002006
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 5207 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-5207.
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Administrator Evaluation; Administrator Qualifications; Administrator Selection; *Educational Administration; Elementary Secondary Education; *Evaluation Utilization; Formative Evaluation; *Leadership Qualities; Measurement Techniques
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

Today there are dozens of instruments that claim to measure leadership capacities. Although every instrument has limitations and must be used carefully, the tests can be used to identify leadership potential. This digest summarizes the reasons for using formal assessments, the attributes measured by such tests, the ways in which leadership potential is measured, and the limits of formal assessment. It is recommended that school district personnel make sure that the test closely matches the demands of the position; determine whether the test satisfies basic statistical criteria such as validity and reliability; and carefully interpret test results. (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 409 605

ERIC DIGEST

JULY 1997 NUMBER 115 EDO-EA-97-7

Measuring Leadership Potential

By Larry Lashway

In an age when business executives take leadership advice from Chinese sages and Gothic warriors, it's clear that our notions of leadership are diverse, if not confused. Everyone agrees that schools require effective leaders, but identifying the necessary traits and skills is not easy.

People often believe they can recognize leadership when they see it, but most schools can tell at least one rueful story about an administrator who turned out to be less than the paragon everyone expected. Thus, interest is always high in finding more reliable ways of identifying and selecting effective leaders. Today, there are dozens of instruments that claim to measure leadership capacities. Do they work? Is it possible to administer a test that will identify leadership potential?

The answer appears to be a qualified "yes," though every instrument has limitations and must be used with care. This *Digest* provides a brief survey of basic issues in the measurement of leadership potential.

Why Use Formal Assessment?

Selection of a school leader is a high-stakes decision that is often hindered by too many applicants and too little information. After screening applicants through resumés and cover letters, most districts rely on the personal interview to make their final choice. Unfortunately, interviews are highly subjective and easily influenced by appearance, mannerisms, and conversational skills (Mark Anderson 1991).

Frederick Wendel and colleagues (1992) point out that a poor choice has economic and organizational consequences. "The cost of paying an ineffective administrator thousands of dollars a year is readily apparent but putting a price on lost opportunities is nearly impossible." Viewed in that light, using objective information to supplement the usual interview process is simply good sense. Kenneth and Miriam Clark (1996) cite evidence that using a carefully chosen battery of tests along with other information provides better prediction than using only professional judgment.

Formal assessments provide several advantages. First, they are objective; scoring is either done by outsiders or is so straightforward there is no room for personal biases. Second, they are designed to systematically explore key leadership qualities. For example, a test can ask half a dozen well-structured questions that probe the candidate's attitude toward teamwork, whereas an interviewer may settle for one open-ended question. Third, feedback from the assessment allows districts to measure candidates against a much larger pool, comparing them to a field of thousands rather than the handful typically invited for interviews.

What Do Leadership Tests Measure?

To be useful, any test requires a clear conception of what is being measured. Unfortunately, after decades of debate, researchers are no closer than ever to a universal definition of leadership (Larry Lashway and colleagues 1997). Over the years, leadership has been correlated to social dominance, vision, intelligence, interpersonal competence, energy, technical skills, charisma, and many other qualities. (One researcher claims to have found over 800 definitions.)

Every test thus reflects a particular set of assumptions about leadership. For example, theorists have endlessly debated the difference between "management" (routine administration) and "leadership" (inspiration and direction-setting).

A test such as "BENCHMARKS" zeroes in on the managerial dimensions (delegating, mastering technical knowledge, solving problems). Conversely, the Leadership Practices Inventory seeks to identify "extraordinary leadership" in categories such as Challenging the Process, Inspiring a Shared Vision, and Encouraging the Heart (Ellen Van Velsor and Jean Leslie 1991). Obviously, the same candidate might perform very differently on these two instruments.

Whatever the definition, formal tests seldom provide a direct measure of leadership performance; instead, they probe a candidate's *perceptions* of his or her performance. Because self-perceptions are highly subjective, test-makers must validate results by correlating scores with actual performance. If those scoring high on the test are shown to perform well on the job, the test has value in predicting success.

EA 028 388

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CLEARINGHOUSE ON EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT • UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

How Is Leadership Potential Measured?

The most common measures are paper-and-pencil instruments. These typically ask subjects to agree or disagree with statements about their behaviors or beliefs, often using a Likert-type scale (1 means "always" and 5 means "never"). In some cases, a similar instrument is given to superiors or subordinates, asking them to rate the leader on the same criteria.

Scoring of tests is done in several ways. In some cases, the test must be sent to the publisher for scoring; sometimes it can be scored locally; and sometimes it can be scored by anyone who has received special training or certification. The meaning of the scores is determined by comparing them to others who have taken the test or to a group of proved leaders. In most cases, certain answers are presumed to be better (more predictive of future success); a high score on "problem-solving" is considered preferable to a low score.

An alternative approach to measurement is used by assessment centers such as the ones sponsored by NASSP. Assessment centers provide a series of simulated leadership tasks and use trained assessors to rate performance on a variety of dimensions, including leadership, judgment, decisiveness, and stress tolerance. Unlike written tests, assessment centers measure performance on tasks similar to those encountered in real settings. (Anderson).

What Are the Limits of Formal Assessment?

Written instruments are relatively simple, inexpensive, and understandable. The major disadvantage is that a written answer on a test is at least one step removed from real behavior; the world is filled with people who test well but fail life. Wendel and colleagues note that paper-and-pencil tests provide *signs* rather than *samples* of leadership capability (just as passing a written driver's test does not guarantee the ability to handle a car effectively).

Because self-perceptions are so subjective (especially in the hiring process, where job-seekers have every reason to paint a rosy picture), feedback from others is a useful supplement. Clark and Clark note that "ratings of superiors by subordinates are the best predictors of good performance as leaders." Unfortunately, not all instruments offer this kind of "360-degree feedback," and even those that do may be irrelevant for entry-level candidates.

Even assessment centers, while more performance oriented, do not directly measure on-the-job behavior. Although "inbasket" exercises and similar problems can provide helpful insights into a candidate's skills, they lack the rich context of a real-life situation, which may confront a leader with dozens of interrelated variables.

Finally, few leadership tests have been developed specifically to select school leaders. Most have been developed in business settings, and their appropriateness for school settings is always a matter for careful deliberation. In addition, relatively few leadership tests have been studied for *predictive validity*; that is, there is no firm evidence that performance on the test today will predict successful leadership over a period of years (Van Velsor and Leslie).

How Should Tests Be Used in Selecting Leaders?

Using formal tests in the selection process requires careful attention to several issues. First, make sure the test matches closely the demands of the position. For example, if district personnel believe the position will require exceptional motivational skills, they should use a test that provides adequate feedback on that dimension. (A detailed description of sixteen well-designed instruments can be found in the review by Van Velsor and Leslie.)

Second, determine whether the test satisfies basic statistical criteria such as validity and reliability. Van Velsor and Leslie warn that using tests for selection requires special attention to predictive validity; for legal and ethical reasons, schools should avoid putting too much weight on a test that has not been shown to measure future (as opposed to current) leadership performance.

Finally, carefully interpret test results rather than reduce them to a simple numerical comparison. What areas of strength and weakness does the candidate show? How well does this profile mesh with the requirements of the position? To what extent are test results consistent with the candidate's resumé and interview?

Like all tests, measures of leadership are designed to provide reliable data, not make decisions. A well-designed instrument will add depth and richness to the selection process, but it will never eliminate the need for careful professional judgment.

RESOURCES

Anderson, Mark. *Principals: How to Train, Recruit, Select, Induct, and Evaluate Leaders for America's Schools*. Eugene, Oregon: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 1991. ED 337 843.

Clark, Kenneth E., and Miriam Clark. *Choosing to Lead*. Greensboro, North Carolina: Center for Creative Leadership, 1996.

Lashway, Larry; JoAnn Mazzarella; and Thomas Grundy. "Portrait of a Leader." In *School Leadership: Handbook for Excellence*, third edition. Edited by Stuart C. Smith and Philip K. Piele. Eugene, Oregon: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 1997.

Van Velsor, Ellen, and Jean Britton Leslie. *Feedback to Managers. Volume II: A Review and Comparison of Sixteen Multi-rater Feedback Instruments*. Greensboro, North Carolina: Center for Creative Leadership, 1991. 301 pages. ED 351 391.

Wendel, Frederick C.; Allan H. Schmidt; and James Loch. *Measurements of Personality and Leadership: Some Relationships*. Lincoln, Nebraska, University of Nebraska, 1992. 121 pages. ED 350 694.

A Product of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management • 5207 University of Oregon • Eugene, Oregon 97403-5207

This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract No. OERI RR93002006. The ideas and opinions expressed in this Digest do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI, ED, or the Clearinghouse. This Digest is in the public domain and may be freely reproduced. EA 028 388.